

Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, November 10, 2019, Year C

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA:**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 20:27-38, Mark 12:18-27

***“Words Are Important”***

We just got back from our Gulf Atlantic Diocese Clergy Conference and Annual Synod at St. Peter's Cathedral in Tallahassee. It was quite a rewarding experience, for me, Marilyn who joined us on Friday, and for Deacons Bob and Diane. It was a tremendous opportunity for them to network with other Anglican Deacons in our Diocese. It was rewarding for them because it was their first “up close” look at an Anglican Diocese. Last year, as they were received into our Diocese, they were in Ireland. It was something that they had planned a long time ago, and so I am very grateful that they had the opportunity to attend this year on your behalf. On Thursday night, we had a marvelous service that ended with both priests and deacons renewing our ordination vows. I was thrilled that both Deacon Diane and Deacon Bob had the opportunity to recommit themselves under a godly Anglican Bishop. They couldn't do it last year, but I am so glad that they were with us this year and will be with us for years to come. It was very special.

Besides all of the business at hand during a synod, there were many opportunities for fellowship and learning. Our speaker during the clergy conference was also the keynote speaker for the synod, The Rev. John Yates II. That name might sound familiar from the news, he is the retired rector of a famous church, Falls Church, Va. They had the unique situation of having to leave their historic property – where our first President, George Washington worshipped. He had a pew set aside and remains there to this day in the Episcopal Falls Church. He expressed the same trials that St. Andrew's experienced, and St. Bartholomew's experienced in Buffalo, when you decided that enough was enough. His talks were inspiring and a great look into the over 30-year ministry that he had at Falls Church, including the starting over in a new facility, something that we are familiar with, and their long lawsuit with The Episcopal Church. He said that the Scripture that kept him going, and inspired him to inspire others them was very simple - 1 Corinthians 10:10, the first part of that Scripture says, *“and do not grumble.”* And it worked. He would remind people and they would keep looking forward and it would keep them on track, that the task at hand was to bring the Gospel to the world.

One of the workshops that I found especially interesting and informative was with an old friend, The Most Rev. Robert Duncan, the first Archbishop of the Anglican Church in North America. During his tenure as Archbishop, he initiated the process of a new Book of Common Prayer for the Anglican Church in North America. When Foley Beach became the new Archbishop, he asked Archbishop Bob to lead the committee that would ultimately see the new book published. He shared some very important insights about modeling our Prayer Book, the ones that are in your pews and that we hold so dear, after the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. Not the 1979 or the 1928, but the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. The power of this book, dating all the way back to the words of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer is based on the idea that “right prayer leads to right belief.” That is Anglican, folks. Archbishop Cranmer carefully sculpted the many prayers and collects based on Holy Scripture and with the idea that these words connect the mind to the thinking with the heart. We don't see the heart as thinking, but if it goes through the head, it should be filtered through the heart.

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I could go on for hours what I learned, but I want you to understand that this 2019 Book of Common Prayer is restoring the faith once given, bringing back prayers that had been removed from the 1979 Prayer Book. For one, we pray together the Collect for Purity at the beginning of the Holy Eucharist service. We pray together, and if you were to look in your book, it says that the priest or celebrant will pray, and may ask the congregation to join in. At the very beginning we are asking God to cleanse us and prepare us, for what we are about to celebrate. It is no longer an option that was omitted by many - it is once again an important part of our service. Another prayer that was modified – or neutered, if you will in Rite One of the 1979 BCP is the Prayer of Humble Access. It is only found in Rite One, not anywhere in Rite Two. In Rite One, the reason I said it was neutered, well – and I want to you see the difference. “We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy. *Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.*”

That is markedly different from what we pray today. The Prayer has been restored to its humble roots of the 1662. Listen: “We do not presume to come to this your table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your abundant and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table; but you are the same Lord whose character is always to have mercy. *Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, **that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.*** We acknowledge and in 1662 the Anglican Church acknowledged – SIN, and the need for us to be humble and seek forgiveness and repentance. That was washed out of the '79 Prayer Book. One of two other words that were changed for a purpose of clarity is ‘manifold.’ If I say the word manifold to you – what do you think of? Did I hear someone say a car? That is why the word manifold was changed to say ‘abundant.’ In old English, manifold was abundant, - so we say abundant. The other word was ‘property.’ What do you think of with the word ‘property?’ Stuff, something that you own. That is why the committee prayerfully decided to change property to ‘character,’ so that when we pray “*whose character is always to have mercy,*” the piety and holiness has been restored to the original intent.

I want to add some information from page 8 of the 2019 Book, that says “Quotations of Scripture in this *Book of Common Prayer (2019)* normally follow *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (ESV)* except for the Psalms and Canticles.” Archbishop Bob said that the purpose of this book is continuity, memorability, musicality and clarity. Let me explain memorability: Please turn to Page 113 of the Prayer Book. Every week after the Absolution, how I walk down the aisle praying the Comfortable Words. Look at the bottom of the page to John 3:16. Do you notice the little “T”? This Book uses the ESV – and it does not have the words “only begotten” instead it says, “gave his only Son.” If I asked you to tell me what John 3:16 said – you would say “only begotten Son” because that is what you memorized and have been saying

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for years. So they decided to incorporate it into the Prayer Book, and out that little ‘T’ there. There are a few other T’s elsewhere but the purpose is to give you recognition, continuity, the memorability, things that you have been saying since you were a young pup, to understand how very important words are. There are other instances as well, but I wanted to share that with you. The Psalter is so beautiful and lyrical, which is where the musicality comes in. They have restored it, rather than something that was just sculpted, back to Coverdale, which was out into the lyrical aspect from Hebrew. Coverdale is what we use for the Psalms, and I wanted you to understand that. The object is recognition and continuity, memorability, musicality and clarity. We need to understand just how very important words are.

In today’s Holy Gospel, the Sadducees had an issue with words as well. You know how the Pharisees and the Sadducees were always trying to trip up Jesus, they were planting little land mines for Him to fall on, but He never fell on them! They came up to Him and posed to Jesus a complex and difficult question, and we have to take it step by step if we’re to see both what was at stake for Jesus and His opponents and what we can learn for ourselves. The Sadducees, the Jewish priestly aristocracy, didn’t believe in the resurrection. Many of you have heard me say when teaching that since they don’t believe in the Resurrection – that is So Sad You See!” The Sadducees wanted to see whether Jesus agreed with the Pharisees. The Sadducees tell Jesus a story which depends on an ancient Jewish law from Deuteronomy 25:5–10 and Genesis 38:8. If a man dies married, but childless, his younger brother is commanded to marry his widow, and count the children as his brother’s, and so keeping up the family line and inheritance. In this story, which they concocted. this happens seven times to one woman. How absolutely absurd that they would come up with this idea. The Sadducees are trying to make a ridiculous point that if all come back to life – whose wife would she be? Jesus carefully, and with a scalpel, as if surgically, puts them in their places – saying that they don’t know the Scriptures or how powerful God really is.

Jesus proposes that the book of Exodus, one of those the Sadducees acknowledged as authoritative, does teach the resurrection, when it describes God as ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.’ The patriarchs are still ‘alive to God’. Let’s go a step further, for in the Gospel, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus takes Peter, James and John, with Him. He goes up to the top of the mountain, and there, a cloud covers them, and Jesus is transformed before their very eyes. Transfigured, if you will, into a dazzling white – there is a glow around Him. His face changes, and there on His right and on His left are Moses and Elijah. Where did they come from if they are dead to God, but they are alive with God. They didn’t just automatically get put together, but they were in their Resurrection bodies. They were Moses – the Law, and Elijah – the Prophets, right on either side of Jesus, who is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. You have to understand that they are live – and still alive. Just as well as our loved ones, who know Jesus and love Jesus, are alive and with Him as well. It means that they are alive in God’s presence, awaiting their final resurrection, on the Last Day. The Sadducees denied that, while the Pharisees believed it.

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Resurrection is not another nice description of being dead. It is the reversal of death, the gift of a new body to enjoy life in God's new world. With death our physical bodies are to be no more – subject to decay – “ashes to ashes, and dust to dust,” and that is the enemy's way of denying the goodness of God's creation, meaning our bodies are temporary. I want to suggest to you that believing in the resurrection should fill us with hope for an ultimate future – in the presence of Almighty God, but it should help us to see and value the created world that we live in – a gift from God. We should never, ever limit God's power – but instead be filled with the hope that what God has made – He will remake! In Revelation, Jesus says “*Behold, I make all things new.*” (Revelation 21:5)

Let us pray: Father, we thank you that You fill us with hope, of eternal life in your presence. You fill us with hope that one day, we will receive new resurrection bodies, and be with You in the New Jerusalem, where Your Son, the Lamb of God, will provide light, that a sun and a moon will not be needed. We look forward to that day, and we pray and ask your blessings until then.